

Ever hear the term "being loved to death"? This certainly applies to plants. Every year many plants are killed from improper mulching. Here are some "Do's and Don'ts" for successful mulching year-round.

## **DO** use the correct mulch. There are two basic types:

- **Organic** consists of wood chips, bark, pine needles, peatmoss, straw or even leaves.
- **Inorganic** consists of gravel, crushed stone, shredded rubber or fabrics. These are infrequently used around plants and trees.
- When deciding which mulch will work best for you, consider the purpose and benefits. Organic mulches all decompose, some faster than others. This can improve the soil by providing a better growing area for roots, supplying nutrients and increasing beneficial soil organisms.

## **DO** mulch plants & trees at the correct time of the year according to their cultivating needs:

- **Summer mulch** is applied in spring and used for that growing season, primarily on annuals and vegetable plants. The purpose is to reduce weed growth, moderate soil temperature and reduce soil evaporation.
- **Winter mulch** is applied in late fall or early winter and provides plants with extra protection from winter's harsh temperatures as well as frost heaving of perennials and young plants.
- **Permanent mulch** is in place year round, typically around trees and shrubs. This mulch protects plants all year from summer heat, winter cold, conserves moisture and reduces weeds. Permanent mulch may need to be replenished every year or two. When replenished, permanent mulch should not exceed 4 inches in depth.

## **DO** use proper mulching & watering techniques for long-term health and survival of plants:

- For trees and shrubs, spread mulch evenly at a depth of 2 – 3 inches.
- Maintain several inches of clearance from the tree trunk, to reduce moisture and decay problems.
- When edging around trees or beds, the dirt or grass that is cut away should not be piled on top of existing mulch or the root ball. This can cause the roots to become buried too deep and result in problems.
- Water new trees deeply and often. Use a "mulch ring" to direct water to the root ball, or watering bags to keep trees watered during dry spells.



## **DON'T...**

- Forget to mulch! Even hardy perennials and established plants will benefit from mulching.
- Mulch more than 4 inches deep.
- Allow mulch to lie against the trunk or stems. This can cause moisture and decay problems.
- Forget to water new trees and shrubs, but don't over water.

Whether you mulch yourself or have someone do it for you, taking the time to mulch correctly pays off in the end with healthy plants for you to enjoy.